

# A Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Maine



**Henry Richards**  
1848-1949

Although a practicing architect for only three of his 100 years, Henry Richards designed several important buildings in Maine. An occasional architect between 1877-1917 while residing in his native Gardiner, Richards' work bore testimony to his superior capabilities.

Born in 1848 in Gardiner, Maine, Henry Richards was raised in comfortable circumstances on land adjoining the estate of his maternal grandfather, Robert Hallowell Gardiner. Young Henry attended schools in England before returning to America for a degree at Harvard College.<sup>1</sup> After graduation in 1869, Richards went to work as a draftsman for the prestigious Boston architectural firm of Ware & Van Brunt. William Robert Ware, who taught courses at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, provided Richards with an opportunity to attend classes while working for the firm.<sup>2</sup> In 1871 Henry Richards married Laura Howe, daughter of Julia Ward Howe and Samuel Gridley Howe. This ensured the aspiring architect a link with Boston's social elite. The couple honeymooned in Europe where Henry sketched historic buildings. Returning to Boston he briefly took a position as head draftsman in the new firm of Peabody & Stearns before establishing his own practice in 1873.<sup>3</sup>

Henry Richards worked as an architect in Boston for only three years. Except for a few houses mentioned in his autobiography, his only known work from this period are the drawings which appeared in the *Architectural Sketch Book*, an important early journal published by the Architectural Sketch Club of Boston. Richards also served as co-editor of this publication (with Francis Chandler) which featured the work of the leading architects of the day.<sup>4</sup>



Figure 1. House for C.H. Dorr, Bar Harbor, 1877-78, South Elevation (Courtesy Lewis Gerrish, Jr.)



Figure 2. House for C.H. Dorr, North Elevation (Courtesy Lewis Gerrish, Jr.)

The economic depression which began in 1873 and reached its nadir in 1876 brought an end to Richards' Boston career. Returning to Gardiner on the urging of his brother Frank, he became a partner of the Richards Paper Company in January, 1876. Although no longer a practicing architect, all of his known work in Maine dates from his years as a resident of Gardiner.<sup>5</sup>

In 1877 Charles H. Dorr of Boston hired Richards to design a summer home at Bar Harbor.<sup>6</sup> Known as "Old Farm," the Dorr Estate was an outstanding early example of "cottage" architecture on Mount Desert Island. In combining elements of the English Queen

Anne style with American Colonial Revival, Old Farm is representative of transitional influences of architectural theory which were soon to be fully developed as the Shingle Style.<sup>7</sup>

The exterior exhibited Queen Anne style characteristics both in its picturesque asymmetry and in its combination of a stone first story with shingled upper stories. Although not evident on the surviving working drawings (Figures 1 and 2), the gable ends were also fully shingled (Figure 3). This absence of Tudor half-timbering suggests a clear rejection of prototypes popularized by the English architect Richard Norman Shaw. The restrained classical details and small paned lights, therefore, probably owe more to American Colonial influences. This is further borne out by the interior woodwork, which consists of panelled walls and coffered ceilings.

Equally as important are the plans which employ large open halls on the two main floors. On the first floor this early example of a "living hall" serves as the nucleus for a free flowing rectangular plan with direct access to all of the major rooms (Figure 4). This arrangement is repeated on the second floor where the hall includes a balcony overlooking the staircase (Figure 5).<sup>8</sup>

Henry Richards' appreciation of early American architecture is also evident in his own residence in Gardiner. Constructed in circa 1814-1816, this Federal style house was first remodelled by the architect in 1879. Alterations to the main portion of the house included a new roof with an unobtrusive dormer and a cornice with modillion blocks that preserved the original lines of the building (Figure 6). At the same time the exterior was painted yellow, an uncommon choice at a time when darker color schemes were then in fashion.<sup>9</sup>



Figure 3. House for C.H. Dorr, Detail of South Elevation, c. 1910 (Courtesy the Bar Harbor Historical Society).



Figure 4. House for C.H. Dorr, First Floor Plan (Courtesy Acadia National Park).

As a resident of Gardiner, Richards devoted most of his time in helping to manage the family business, which included the design of factory buildings.<sup>10</sup> Through a strong sense of civic duty, however, he found an outlet for his architectural talents. In 1881 he contributed his services to designing the local library. This building, only the second public library in Maine, is distinctive for its English-inspired Jacobethian exterior (Figure 7). Although never very popular for domestic or commercial uses, this style did find favor as a vehicle for public buildings. Weld Hall for Harvard College (Ware & Van Brunt, 1871-72) is a notable example on a much grander scale. The plan for the Gardiner Library is a simple rectangle with an exterior stairhall. The use of multiple dormers and triple-hung sash meet the requirements of a well-lighted public space.

By 1900 the Richards Paper Company had succumbed to competition from larger out-of-state firms.



Figure 6. House of Laura and Henry Richards, Gardiner, c. 1880 view (Photo MHPC).



Figure 5. House for C.H. Dorr, Second Floor Plan (Courtesy Acadia National Park).

An avocation which kept the Henry Richards busy for the next thirty years was the Merryweather Camp on Belgrade Great Pond, the first boys' camp in Maine and the second in the United States. Begun in 1900 and managed by Richards and his wife, this small enclave consisted of a lodge and cabins designed in a rustic mode by the architect. For both Laura and Henry, Merryweather Camp was a source of great personal satisfaction until its official demise in the 1930s.<sup>11</sup>

The last major architectural design by Henry Richards was the house of William Amory Gardner at Beverly, Massachusetts. Built in 1915-1917, this large stone Tudor style structure clearly derived inspiration from "Oaklands" (1835-36, Richard Upjohn, architect), the house of Robert Hallowell Gardiner which Richards knew intimately in his youth. As such it is a fitting swan song in a career that was abandoned for his family and his native city.<sup>12</sup>

Roger G. Reed  
October, 1984



Figure 7. Public Library, Gardiner, c. 1910 (Postcard view MHPC).

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Lewis C. Zalmer, *Henry Richards, 1848-1949*, privately printed booklet, n.d., pp. 11-14. Henry Richards, *Ninety Years On*, Gardiner, 1940, p. 262. Richards' father was English-born and owned a paper mill in Gardiner.
- <sup>2</sup> Richards, op. cit., p. 267. Ware had founded the first architectural school at an American university in 1868.
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 296-97.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 316. Richards mentions the design of a brick schoolhouse on Dorchester Street in Boston and a "house for General Paine's sisters" at Beverly Farms on the north shore. His Episcopal Church design, published in the August, 1876 issue of *The Architectural Sketch Book*, was built in South Boston. In his autobiography Richards states that he would not have given up his practice if he had obtained any one of three commissions he competed for: the Chicago, Illinois Courthouse and City Hall, the State Prison at Concord, Massachusetts, and the High School for Providence, Rhode Island.
- <sup>5</sup> Richards, op. cit., pp. 317-318.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 344. No good views have come to light of the George Hale cottage built at Bar Harbor the year before.
- <sup>7</sup> William Ralph Emerson designed "Redwood", probably the first Shingle Style house, in Bar Harbor, in 1879.
- <sup>8</sup> The house was torn down in 1951. Dorr originally engaged New York architect A.F. Oakey to prepare plans for his cottage. Oakey's plans and perspective views were published in the *American Architect and Building News* on January 20, 1877. Vincent Scully, in his seminal study *The Shingle Style* (New Haven, 1955), was unaware of the Richards design and assumed Oakey's had been executed. The latter's exterior is wildly picturesque and owes much more to the English Queen Anne than does Richards' scheme. Scully praises Oakey's plan for its freedom and open character (Scully, pp. 54-55). The Henry Richards arrangement is clearly superior in this respect.
- <sup>9</sup> A third story was also added to the ell. Richards, op. cit., p. 326. In 1904 the south porch was added. Other alterations, such as the changes to the carriage house, may have occurred at this time.
- <sup>10</sup> Richards, op. cit., pp. 399-400; *Gardiner Home Journal*, May 28, 1879.
- <sup>11</sup> Richards, op. cit., pp. 454-55. Laura Richards was famous as the author of numerous children's books.
- <sup>12</sup> Richards, op. cit., p. 449. This house is now part of Endicott Junior College. Other designs by Richards outside of Maine include an Episcopal Church in Andover in the 1880s, three faculty houses for Groton School in the 1900s, the Toby Club on Toby Island, and a "house for Winsor at Cataumet, Cape Cod", Richards' op. cit., pp. 449.

## LIST OF KNOWN COMMISSIONS IN MAINE

BY HENRY RICHARDS

"Schooner Head", Cottage for George Hale, Bar Harbor, 1876, Destroyed  
 "Old Farm", Cottage for Charles H. Dorr, Bar Harbor, Designed 1877-78, Built 1879, Destroyed  
 Chimney Stack and Boiler House, Richards Paper Company, Gardiner, 1879, Destroyed  
 Oak Mantel, Frank Richards House, Gardiner, 1879, Destroyed  
 Additions to "Yellow House" for Henry and Laura Richards, 3 Dennis Street, Gardiner, 1879/1904, Extant  
 Gardiner Public Library, Main Street, Gardiner, 1881, Extant  
 Central Street Grammar School, Central Street, Gardiner, 1886, Altered.  
 Gardiner Hospital, Gardiner, 1880s, Destroyed or Not Executed  
 Sulphite Pulp Mill, Richards Paper Company, South Gardiner, 1894, Destroyed  
 Addition to Gardiner Public Library, Gardiner, c. 1900, Not Executed  
 Merryweather Camp, Belgrade Great Pond, 1900-01, Extant.

## ARCHITECTURAL DRAWINGS

The Gardiner Public Library has blueprints of the proposed additions to that building. Lewis Gerrish, Jr., Bar Harbor, Maine, owns the four elevation drawings of Old Farm. Mr. Gerrish also has floor plans which show alterations to this house by Fred Savage, a local architect. Blueprints of these floor plans are located at the Bar Harbor Historical Society.

## SOURCES

In addition to those mentioned, Mrs. Laura Wiggins, the daughter of Henry Richards, was helpful to my research.

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